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Over 381,000 college students are suspended or dismissed each year for academic reasons. These college failouts exhibit the full range of academic potential but are hampered by such things as low self concept, inadequate language skills of reading, writing, listening and speaking, a lack of ability to make sound decisions, a lack of meaningful goals, or psychiatric disturbances. Currently used approaches to help low achieving students include: (1) academic suspension or dismissal with the possibility of readmission after a stipulated period, (2) remedial courses, programs, and how-to-study courses, (3) tutoring, and (4) individual and/or group counseling. A model is proposed for a comprehensive approach which may be adapted for use at individual institutions. It involves a thorough educational diagnosis to identify specific causes for low achievement and viable alternatives for action. When appropriate, an individual rehabilitation program could pinpoint the causes of each student's underachievement. A 3-track system would enable the matching of emphasis in each track (language skill development, time and work scheduling, and improvement of self concept) with a student's primary problem in any one area. Since the goal is maximum student development, the staff member would act as a catalyst to facilitate learning and to encourage a great deal of individual responsibility on the part of the student. (WM)

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Section 29
Tuesday Morning, March 4

HELPING TO SALVAGE THE COLLEGE FAILOUT*

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The best kept secret of American higher education is that there are over 381,000 students annually who are suspended or dismissed from college for academic reasons. This unbelieveably large number of failouts represents a significant loss of brainpower to the American society. In addition, from the standpoint of the student and his family it represents a traumatic situation of great intensity with a shattering of plans for the future.

It is important to differentiate between the college failout and the college dropout because the latter term is the one most frequently encountered. It refers to all students who discontinue their education for at least one term by "dropping out" of a particular college. They may plan to return, have transferred, have been suspended for disciplinary reasons, have been dismissed for low academic performance, have gone into the armed service, etc. The term covers such a wide variety of cases that it is not especially useful at the college level. A high school dropout terminates his education but as Eckland[1] points out this is usually not true of the college dropout. Therefore, in this paper the discussion will be limited to those who have been suspended or dismissed for academic reasons and who can be called, failouts.

A faculty member recently remarked, "Why should I be concerned about a student who fails out of college? It is evident that he didn't belong there or he would have succeeded." This point of view is held by the majority of educators and is based upon one of two assumptions: either the failout doesn't have adequate potential or, if he has, he doesn't want an education enough to work hard. In both cases, it is natural to conclude that he doesn't belong in college.

The two assumptions are true about only a minority of college failouts. To begin with, college failouts exhibit the full range of academic potential, from very low to very high. At the Educational Development Center, studies show that eighty-one percent of over 700 failouts from 225 colleges have sufficient ingelligence to place them in the top sixteen percent of general population, while twenty-two percent are in the top two percent of the general population. Many of these students want desperately to be successful but they are hampered by such things as a low self concept, inadequate language skills of reading, writing, listening and speaking, a lack of ability to make sound decisions, a lack of meaningful goals, or psychiatric disturbance.

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*Paper presented to Section 29 on "Helping to adjust failouts at a college" at the 24th National Conference on Higher Education, sponsored by the American Association for Higher Education, Chicago, Tuesday morning, March 4. Permission to quote restricted.

[1]Eckland, B. K. "College Dropouts Who Came Back," Harvard Educational Review, 1964, Vol. 34, No. 3, pp. 402-420.

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Approaches to Helping Failouts

There are a large variety of approaches employed by colleges in their relationship to the low achieving student. They may be divided into four categories and a given college may use more than one of the approaches in its effort to do something on behalf of the student.

1. The requirement of time.

The most common approach is that of discontinuing the relationship of the student with the college for a period of time, generally ranging from one term to one year. This is usually referred to as academic suspension or academic dismissal and, in most cases, the student is eligible to apply for readmission at the end of the stipulated period.

This approach appears to be aimed at the immature student and says in effect, "It is time to grow up and to become serious about your education." There is value in proceeding in this manner, particularly if some constructive alternatives are presented for the student to engage in during the period of separation. Without such alternatives for action, the process becomes one of chance with the suspended student engaging in trial and error behavior with a low probability of success upon his return to college.

2. Skill development programs.

A survey of skill development programs or courses designed to provide special assistance to the unsuccessful student indicates that they are of three major types: remedial courses (e.g., remedial English), reading programs, and how-to-study courses. All three may be found at one time or another at the same college.

An observation may be made that remedial courses and how-to-study courses are usually operated from the premise that the problem is that the student does not possess the correct information and, therefore, the courses are designed to communicate this information. A different way of looking at the problem is to identify the basic trouble as the student's failure to transfer information into actual behavior. When this analysis is used, the emphasis in the programs is upon involving the student in activities designed to produce a maximum of behavioral change rather than structuring the course to communicate a selected body of knowledge.

There is a wide range of reading programs in American colleges and universities. The most common approach involves the development of increased reading speed through special courses in the curriculum. For the student in serious academic difficulty, the emphasis upon speed reading has little practical value and this limitation should be noted by college personnel. When the student is deficient in reading skills, he can profit most from a remedial reading approach which has an emphasis upon such things as word attack skills, vocabulary expansion and reading comprehension. Excellent commercial materials are available to equip the reading laboratory.

3. Tutoring

The utilization of the tutoring approach has been given special emphasis in the past few years by the admission of large numbers of culturally distinct students

into institutions of higher education. The Ohio Board of Regents, for example, designated $425,000.00 for such tutoring at state universities. By its very nature, tutoring is subject matter oriented and provides visible support to students who are having difficulty in specific courses. It is probably most appropriate for providing assistance in making the transition to college level mathematics courses, where the course starts beyond the experience of the student or when it moves so rapidly that the student is unable to absorb the concepts by himself in the time allocated. Tutoring is also of value in providing assistance on a short range basis for students in verbally oriented college courses. It is, in my opinion, of limited value in providing long range rehabilitation because of its tendency to produce dependency on the part of the person being tutored.

4. Programs designed to change student perceptions.

The basic objective of approaches in this category is to affect, in a positive manner, the way in which the student views himself, his college and his life's goals. The most frequent technique employed is that of individual and/or group counseling.

A review of research findings in this area indicates that few generalizations can be made as to the effectiveness of counseling in improving the academic performance of low achieving students. Gilbreath[1] reacts to the problem of conflicting results by suggesting that a more precise definition must be made of the particular kinds of students to be helped by a given type of counseling experience. He writes, " ... the questions being asked in research on group counseling with academic underachievers are similarly too general and should not be, 'Does group counseling work with academic underachievers?' but rather, at the very least, 'What kind of group counseling works most effectively with what kind of academic underachievers?'" Apparently, a great deal of research remains to be done on matching students with particular approaches to counseling.

In addition to the efforts being exerted by colleges and universities there are a number of exploratory efforts being made by non-profit organizations concerned about the failout problem. One such program is that of the Educational Development Center of Berea, Ohio. It has been in existence for five years and during this time has worked with over 700 failouts from American institutions of higher education.

The approach of the Educational Development Center is based upon a medical model rather than upon an educational model. The first element in the program is a thorough educational diagnosis designed to identify specific causes for an individual's low achievement and, on this basis, to identify viable alternatives for action. When appropriate, the student is offered a custom designed rehabilitation program of eight to ten weeks in duration. The College Achievement Program requires full time participation and involves 40-60 hours of work each week. Upon successful completion of the program, the student re-enters college to complete his formal education.

The primary emphases of the College Achievement Program are upon improving the language skills and upon affecting the perceptual field of the students. A given

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[1]Gilbreath, S. H., "Appropriate and inappropriate group counseling with academic underachievers," Journal of Counseling Psychology, 1968, Vol. 15, No. 6, 506-511.

student's program is based upon those areas which are crucial as far as his future academic success is concerned.

A Proposed Model For A College Program

What else can we learn from a study of existing programs for the low achieving college student? Let me propose a theoretical model for a comprehensive approach, which can be adapted for use upon the individual college campus. It should be recognized at the onset that modifications must be made in order to make it appropriate for the unique situation existing upon a particular campus. The primary reason for this uniqueness being the staff who are available to implement the program.

1. A summer program.

From a practical standpoint, most colleges are likely to be able to implement a new program effectively during the summer. To begin with, the greatest number of suspensions occur at the end of the Spring term and, secondly, facilities and staff are usually more available for special programming. These factors combine to make summer the best time for most institutions to schedule a major effort.

The male student is especially able to benefit from this type of scheduling because, if successful, he can re-enter college with a minimum of time out. This, of course, reduces his availability for the draft.

2. A diagnostic approach.

To the extent that care is exercised to determine the causes of underachievement as far as the individual is concerned, it is possible to design a rehabilitation program uniquely fitted to assist a given student to get on his feet academically. In addition to this, effort must be expended to answer the questions raised about adequate potential and extent, if any, of psychiatric disturbance. In both cases, special referrals may be needed so that the student is headed in the direction most likely to be beneficial to him as an individual.

Diagnosis for this purpose requires more than the giving of a few tests and the mechanical interpretation of percentile scores. The best way to express the need is to emphasize that professional sophistication must be involved in arriving at the point of interpretation and the interpretation must lead to the assignment of the student to the type of program most likely to provide the assistance needed.

3. A series of program channels.

A fundamental step in practicing effective medicine is make an accurate diagnosis so that the resulting prescription will be suited to correct the basic problem. It is important in educational rehabilitation to design programs with enough flexibility and variability to enable the prescription to approximate the uniqueness of the individual's problem.

As a practical approach for a college, I would like to suggest a three track system so that the predominant emphasis in each track can be matched with those students whose primary problem lies in that area. Suggested emphasis areas are: (1) language skill development (reading, writing, speaking, listening),

(2) organization of one's time and work, and, (3) improvement of self concept. Every student's program would include elements from each of the areas but primary emphasis would be individualized by assigning more of a given element and less of another to the particular student.

4. An emphasis upon student involvement.

The objectives and content of each of the three channels are crucial. A fundamental tenet is that every element must be aimed at securing maximum student development and should require a great deal of individual responsibility for the learning process. This implies that the class sessions have a minimum of lecture and a maximum of small group interaction. The emphasis would shift from the communication of content or information to the techniques designed to increase student participation. In this type of context, the staff member acts as a catalyst to facilitate learning.

Conclusion

With the move toward universal higher education gaining momentum, with its accompanying increased value on a college education, it is not too soon to establish special programs for failouts on every campus. It will be important to exercise creativity in the design and to make significant efforts toward the development of systems which will make possible the individualization of the rehabilitation approach. The proposed model to accomplish this includes a summer program employing a diagnosis to identify feasible alternatives for action, a series of three program channels, and a strong emphasis upon student involvement.